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ABSTRACT

The results relating to staff development, contained in a Rand Corporation survey on change agents, are summarized in this paper. The researchers discovered that successful staff development program implementation was characterized by three major components: local materials development, online planning, and concrete, ongoing training. Their research indicated two basic types of staff development models--the deficit model and the "developmental strategy" model. The developmental strategy model involves teachers and principals in preparing for change and is not standardized. The school district offers consistent financial support and relies on local resource people to guide innovative efforts whenever possible. The researchers conclude that effective staff development depends much more on the district's point of view about principals and teachers as learners than on the specifics of the staff development program. (Author/DS)

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THE ART OF RETOOLING EDUCATIONAL STAFF DEVELOPMENT IN A PERIOD OF RETRENCHMENT

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THE ART OF RETOOLING EDUCATIONAL STAFF DEVELOPMENT IN A PERIOD OF RETRENCHMENT

by Milbrey W. McLaughlin and Paul Berman

Two reasons seem to underly the current resurgence of interest in staff development. One has to do with student enrollment decline. More and more districts are faced with the reality of fewer students, a decreased budget, and consequently a stable and possibly stale staff. Districts have fewer opportunities to "hire" enthusiasm and new ideas, but instead must consider the professional development needs of the staff they already have. A second reason is that research has confirmed what practitioners knew all along: new technologies, "validated" programs, or more money are not panaceas. Specifically, researchers have now shown that the "best" educational products in the hands of unmotivated or inadequately trained teachers are unlikely to fulfill their promise. Thus, the research community is beginning to turn its attention from assessing the effectiveness of educational "products" to the training and professional development needs of teachers.

While staff development is increasingly recognized as a critical concern for school districts--not just a frill or an extra--there also seems to be consensus that current staff development practices are poor. Teachers, administrators, researchers, and bureaucrats all agree that current staff development or inservice programs are irrelevant, ineffective and generally a waste of time and money. To make matters worse, most staff development programs lack any solid conceptual model. Instead, "staff development" within school districts typically appear to be a hodgepodge of incompatible workshops and courses.

What would an effective model of staff development look like? For the past four years, Rand has been doing research on how change comes about in local school districts. The Change Agent Study* involved survey research in 293 Title III, Vocational Education Part D, Title VII bilingual and Right-To-Read projects in school districts across the

*P Berman and M. McLaughlin; *Federal Programs Supporting Educational Change: The Findings in Review;* R-1589/4-HEW, The Rand Corporation, April 1975.

country. Intensive fieldwork was done in 30 of these districts. As we reviewed the data collected from these very different local innovative projects, one lesson emerged clearly: successful change agent projects seem to be operating as staff development projects.

Our findings about the components of successful "change agent" projects offer clues for staff development. Specifically, we found that neither the amount of money spent on a project, nor the particular project technology was consistently or significantly related to project success. Instead two local factors were among the most important in determining the outcomes of projects. One was institutional support from administrators: Did the district really want the project? Were they supporting teachers' efforts? Were the principals behind it? We found that principals were the "gatekeepers of change." Unless they actively supported the project, it seldom worked and was hardly ever continued after three or five years. One key indication of principals' commitment turned out to be their participation in staff training activities, not just in attending the first "orientation lectures" but also in their regular attendance at workshops.

The second factor related to project outcomes was the "implementation strategy"--local choices about how to put a project into practice. A number of components of an implementation strategy emerged as particularly and consistently important to successful change agent projects:

1. *Local Materials Development.* Staff in successful projects spend a lot of time developing their own curriculum materials. As we tried to understand why this contributed to success, it seemed to have less to do with the virtue of the pedagogical product but more to do with staff development--a learning by doing exercise.
2. *On-line Planning.* By this we mean a kind of project planning that began a month or two before the project started and continued all the way through it, not just the first years. This planning mechanism provided a format--usually regular staff meetings--in which teachers or administrators could say, "Something is not working," "It is working," "We should revise our objectives,"

and so on. This mode of planning allows project guidelines and methods to be revised over time, based on the changing needs and experience of project staff.

3. *Concrete Ongoing Training.* This training continued through the first, second and third year of the project and was related to on-line planning. It was training that was typically offered by *local* people; it was concrete, it was hands-on.

What do these components of a successful implementation strategy have in common? How do they relate to staff development? First of all, they are highly relevant to on-going classroom activities. They are typically user-identified; through on-going planning, teachers can play an important role in identifying what their training should be. These strategies are flexible and able to change as needs change. They support individual learning. In short, they seem to describe "a heuristic model" of staff development.

Stepping back from these findings, the change agent research suggests that there are two very different ways to view teacher training. One could be described as a deficit model, which in the extreme attempts to supply "teacher-proof" packages. This model tries to *do away* with problems by doing away with process. But by doing away with the process, chances to learn are also lost. The second model is a development model that focuses on problem-solving methodologies. Instead of trying to do away with the process, this model tries to give teachers the skills to identify and solve problems themselves. The change agent study clearly found the second model to be the more effective approach to staff training and to enduring change.

Though these findings were derived from studying innovative projects, they appear to hold for the broader issue of retooling staff development in the present and coming period of retrenchment. Analogous to the two models of teacher training, school districts seem to ascribe to either or the other of two perspectives or strategies toward the continuing

need for staff development. One strategy is, consciously or not, built on a deficit model.

The deficit model assumes that problems in the school or with teachers have to do with inadequate information, inadequate skills, and so on; if these skills and information could only be imparted to teachers, they would be more effective in the classroom. Nor surprisingly, these staff development programs are typically "top-down"; they seem to imply that the experts in central office clearly know what teachers' needs are, and so will prescribe a regimen of programs for the deficient. There is little staff participation either in the determination of the format, or in deciding what should be offered. Moreover, programs are typically standardized across the district. For example, all teachers of the appropriate grade level would be required to attend a "validated-product" reading workshop or a sure-fire math workshop, which often relies on the lecture/consultant format--the delivery-of-truth-and-knowledge. Little or no attention is paid to an individual teacher's needs or to a particular school's needs. The major incentives for participants in systems using the deficit model seem to be credit on the salary scale or fulfilling the relicensing regulations with little or no release time for teachers.

We have seen the deficit model used in a number of school districts, with predictable results. Teachers generally thought the workshops were irrelevant and, moreover, that the district cared little about the staff development program. Teachers in these systems felt that the administration was participating in a ritual--that staff development was not a priority for the district. Otherwise, the district would make arrangements for release time, and involve teachers in the design of the program. So teachers perpetuated the ritual, too. One teacher told us, for example, "I may have to go and I'll collect my $30.00, but I don't have to listen." The result, as we looked around districts where the deficit model operated, was a lot of the same old practice, despite the introduction of new technologies. Very little that was different was actually going on in the classroom.

In sharp contrast to the deficit model, some districts have approached the continuing need for staff development with a different *point of view* and with markedly more success. Rather than give it a new label, we simply say they followed a "developmental strategy." A developmental strategy is not any single program, for these successful districts all used different programs, but rather it is a *point of view* that pervades the whole district--a set of expectations about the role of teachers, about their professional needs, and about their responsibility for solving their own problems in the classroom. The developmental point of view can be summarized by six characteristics:

1. Developmental districts give discretionary funds as well as considerable authority to principals and teachers, and they do so in both good and bad times. For example, one large budget-paring school district had to shave $5,000,000 off their budget. But one item that school board members and administrators agreed could not be cut was the discretionary funds. They felt that if teachers and principals are going to be held responsible for what happens in their school, they need the resources and authority to do the job.
2. The continuing "training" of principals was considered both necessary and appropriate. The developmental districts recognized the shift that has taken place in the role of the principal in the past decade--from authoritarian administrator to educational leader to school manager. To fulfill this changing role, developmental districts expect and require principals to participate in staff training activities and to transfer to other schools at regular intervals.
3. Several developmental districts have established teacher centers that serve a variety of functions. Effective teacher centers are attractive, not broom closets. They are comfortable, and give the impression the district is putting its money behind its rhetoric. Where these teacher centers worked, they provided the context for useful peer interaction, for cross-fertilization, and for peer evaluation. These informal activities, in our judgement,

were more important than any of the new technologies or programs that were part of the formal center activities.

4. Districts thathave an effective staff development program do not insist on a standardized district program. They emphasize small groups, for instance, groups of about four to eight within a school working collaboratively on the same need.
5. Developmental districts relied on local resource people to guide innovative efforts whenever possible. These districts utilized joint governance in determination of staff development needs and activities. The joint governance between teachers and administration seems to be critical to staff development programs for a number of reasons. For example, different people in the system have very different perspectives on what teachers needs are. A program decision structure which incorporates varying perceptions about teacher needs is more likely to receive the support and commitment from all those involved.
6. Developmental districts use release time instead of monetary incentives for staff training. Providing release time is difficult, but is not an insurmountable obstacle. Districts, with the cooperation of parents and the school board, can juggle schedules and provide this time. The provision of release time seems critical for at least two reasons. One, teaching requires an enormous amount of physical and psychic energy; it is unrealistic to expect teachers to undertake significant professional growth activities entirely in the evenings or on weekends. Second, provision of release time seems to provide a "signal" to teachers that the district takes their professional development seriously and that they should take it seriously as well. Clearly, there has to be some kind of combination of personal time and release time, but if staff development programs are to contribute to the vitality and quality of a district's educational program, release time is an issue that cannot be swept under the rug.

In summary, the effective district staff development model, just like the successful change agent model, seems to be heuristic. It provides a variety of options, it has a flexible program format, it stresses individual and small-group learning, it is concrete and directly tied to on-going activities. In short, staff development is assumed to be an adaptive learning process in which (a) learners--namely, principals and teachers--have different needs at different times, (b) learners themselves must know what it is they need to know, (c) learners must be willing, and (d) learners must be *able*. The structure, or the formating of staff development, must be something that supports learning, and principals and teachers must have enough energy left after work to go on learning. But the best staff development program will fail in the long run unless district central administrators explicitly see principals and teachers as professionals and visibly support their efforts to learn and grow. In the final analysis, effective staff development depends much more on the district's point of view about principals and teachers as learners than on the specifics of the staff development program.